



on movers and shapers

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ines schaber and jörg stollmann

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storefront for art and architecture
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timeless When people told us about the desert they often described it as a timeless landscape. We heard that the forces, which have shaped the terrain, had been at work for millions of years. Today, the consistency of the desert evokes a feeling of security and hospitality in the people that live there.

story Early Monday morning, April 2001. We were en route, escorting a work crew preparing a 20 foot high Saguaro Cactus for its first voyage. It is to be transplanted from a copper mine near Tucson, Arizona, to a recently completed housing development in the Phoenix Metro Area. Very carefully, its arms are supported and preserved before the workers excavate the giant and finally lift it onto a specially rigged flatbed. After a three-hour drive and an overnight repose the cactus arrives, ready to be positioned in the front yard of a recently constructed home. It is placed a few feet to the right of the split-ranch adobe's main entrance, the position prescribed to it by its new owner. Here, the cactus becomes part of a new landscape. According to the development's design concept, collected native plants of various origins are assembled and redistributed on the site. The huge desert-style lots blend smoothly into the surrounding open space, and at the horizon the development merges into the natural desert without walls or any other visual barrier. The cactus has taken its place in a landscape that sometimes resembles the Sonoran, sometimes the Mojave, and sometimes, as such, a desert that does not yet exist. At the end of its voyage, it finds itself integrated into a built image of the desert, an image housing a few hundred well-to-do homeowners.

visual movement Car traffic is visually directed by the positioning of plants. A concentration of some more colorful desert plants is sprinkled at a crossroads to ease the stopping and starting of traffic.

visual gating In some communities, the actual gates and fences start to appear long after one has crossed the community's property line. However, after one has left the public road, an increasing density of well-fed and strictly maintained desert plants builds a subtle contrast to the landscape outside. They let a stranger know he or she is trespassing on the community's private grounds. To the homeowner, the enriched landscaping is signaling he is coming home.

borrowed view In affluent communities, the vista towards the desert is so extensive - until it reaches a slope or a small mountain, artificial or natural - that the homeowners have the impression the community's interior is endlessly extended into the desert. Having originated in English garden design during the eighteenth century, the principle of the borrowed view is that of a vista extended beyond the property line. Used by designers today, the concept gives the spectator's eye substance by denying the visibility of any differentiating lines upon the ground. In the newly landscaped communities of the Arizona desert, the borrowed view not only creates a blending of private and public surfaces within the community, it extends its influence to the borders and edges of the property as well. Anything visible is here considered to be the community's common ground, and serves to negate the boundaries.

to the outside that had previously been so relevant in defining the interior. Additional untouched desert land is bought for the purpose of creating a subtle transition between the periphery of the private lots at the development's edge and the untouched desert zones surrounding the site.

seamless In a gated development in northern Scottsdale, the design guidelines characterize different zones of landscaping. Each zone is built up through a specific palette of plant material.

The arrangement of these zones ensures the seamless blending of all areas visible from the community with the horizon beyond. Hence, large areas of untouched desert are incorporated at the edges of the community to ensure endless views.

tag All over Arizona, native plants are sold and transplanted to someone else's property. In order to sell, the owner has to sign a Native Plant Removal and Transportation Permit with the state of Arizona declaring the name of the purchaser. The permit also states the quantity of plants being sold and the tag numbers that they are registered under. The state tag has to stay on a plant until it has reached its new location.

desert The Sonoran Desert possesses unique vegetation with the well-developed ability to grow in arid soil, to gather and conserve moisture and to withstand both great daytime heat as well as cold nights and abrasive winds. The desert is understood to have taken its name from the Tohono O'odham (Papago) language term Sonota, which means place of plants.

arizona mission mine The mining complex is situated 24 kilometers south of Tucson. In March 2000, a Native Plants and Wood Removal Application for 1100 Barrel Cacti, 840 Hedgehogs, 375 Prickly Pear Cacti, 637 Saguaro Cacti, 1460 Pincushion, 470 Cholla Cacti and 500 Mesquite Trees was signed by a private wholesaler. The application was approved by the Arizona Department for Agriculture and the plants were salvaged from a small section of the mine's 3,200 total acres. A couple of weeks later about 70 percent of these plants were on their way to Phoenix, another 25 percent to several other cities in California and Arizona. About five percent traveled much further, crossing the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans to England, Spain, Saudi Arabia and Japan.

saguaro The State of Arizona has two cactus cops, Enforcement Officers for Native Plants and Antiquities, who investigate and prosecute the theft of desert plants. Cacti is considered a felony because of the plant's increased market value. Today, the market value of a large Saguaro cactus can be more than 5000 dollars.

desert pavement Contractors are directed to salvage and store the native ground materials that are found on-site, so-called Desert Pavement. They must reapply the material after construction and mimic the look and density of the Desert Pavement in adjacent undisturbed areas to provide a seamless transition between the two.

value Native plants are qualified according to their usefulness in landscaping. A plant is useful if it is beautiful, healthy, and can acclimate easily into a new environment. For example, a Palo Verde tree that originally grew on a sloping wash has a root system that is too deformed to be transplanted onto horizontal ground. This Palo Verde would be considered to have no market value.

fully automatic drip irrigation system A system of rigid PVC piping is placed below the upper layer of desert ground in order to water all new plants.

gps Global Positioning System technology is used to locate cacti and other plant material for inventories. A surveyor is sent out to the field equipped with a backpack antenna and a portable computer in order to register the plants and qualify their status. On a digital map of the territory, which is displayed on the computer screen, a blinking cross graphically represents the surveyor's location at any time.

lawn Bermuda grass is extremely resistant. Once established, it keeps constantly growing back. In order to turn tropical landscaping into desert landscaping one has to chemically kill the lawn.

desert A developer told us that baby boomers who are buying into communities today "have a different relation to ecology," and that the desert seems a feasible thing to sell.

tag In developments that use desert landscaping, large amounts of native plants are moved around within a property's boundaries.

After the plants on a given site are inventoried, they receive a tag with a reference number. The reference number refers back to the location of the plant, and whether it is considered salvageable or not. The tag has to stay until a city official authorizes the classification. If approved, the plant is either left in its original location or transplanted to a temporary nursery before it reaches its final destination within the development. If the plant is not salvageable, it is destroyed.

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cc&rs The rules that ensure the aesthetic and social stability of a development are called the Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions. Today, it is nearly impossible to buy a new home that does not have CC&Rs embedded in the deed.

The Arizona State Congress is debating CC&Rs' legality because the majority of new homebuyers have no other choice but to accept these terms.

common sense With CC&Rs, common sense is established long before the first homeowners move into the development.

unsightly materials Through the banning of unsightly materials, the CC&Rs prevent certain activities and interventions by the homeowners. That way, the communities are theoretically very open to welcoming a heterogeneous group of users as long as everyone conforms to not status difference visually.

paint job The adaptation of the buildings' colors to those of the terrain that they occupy has the effect of camouflaging an entire development within what appears to be an undisturbed natural setting.

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tag Besides the golf courses, small patches of lawn are still used in desert landscaping. They

serve as soft outdoor carpets for children and domestic animals. Moreover, they are considered pleasing to the eye.

maintenance Previously, homeowners in American suburbs were themselves responsible for the tidiness of their properties' appearance, maintaining their gardens and landscaping themselves. Most of the homeowners living in the more recent developments we found in Phoenix do not engage in gardening anymore. Working or spending their time using the various leisure facilities that their communities provide, the planting and care taking of the landscape is commissioned to professional gardeners. These specialists ensure that the appearance of the property corresponds to the communities' regulations.

blending The term blending is used to describe the seamless visual transition of all areas - private, common, or untouched - visible from within a community.

location Phoenix' city structure is defined by a 1 square mile grid. It is formed by a road network that defines the main traffic arteries. The streets inside these larger roads form a more private structure of smaller, mostly curving lanes and cul-de-sacs. Most of the time it is not possible to make a shortcut across these blocks. In the outer city and in the bigger gated communities beyond, the streets of the grid system access only one entry and exit that points to an otherwise enclosed world within the residential development. In the 1990's, the City of Phoenix began to add another layer of transit, building a park system that both breaks up the enclosed blocks and connects between them by establishing a continuous structure of paths, promenades, sport grounds and washes.

snow birds There are people who come to Arizona for the winter months, returning to eastern and northern regions for the summer. They choose their place in relation to weather and climate.

typical house 2000 If one buys a house in Phoenix today, he or she has to buy a community along with it.

story Creating a comprehensive story of his community is the first thing a developer does. The story shall connect the community to the site it is constructed on. From there, the prevalent lifestyle theme, the appropriate looks and the rules are formulated.

gates A developer told us he does not believe that gates prevent crime. But, he added, they provide the residents with a sense of security in knowing who belongs and who doesn't.

sameness The aesthetic homogeneity of a community evokes a feeling of security. Hence, an individual aesthetic statement of one of the homeowners might easily be considered offensive.

preventative control Homeowner associations enforce the CC&Rs after a developer has finally sold all of the homes and withdrawn from managing the community. They govern the shared common property. Their goal is to allow for as little change as possible.

arizona There are five distinct vegetation zones in Arizona. Out of the hot deserts they march upwards, starting from the Lower Sonoran desert. The Upper Sonoran, the Transition, the Canadian, and the Hudsonian follow. (This is Arizona, magazine, 1962)

saguaro It takes at least 75 years until a Saguaro Cactus sprouts its first arm.

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